

**Testimony before the Board of Directors of the
Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority
October 11, 2006**

Thank you Chairman Mack and Members of the Board. My name is Kathy Porter and I am the Mayor of the City of Takoma Park, Maryland. I am here today with my colleagues from the City Council, staff of the City government, and many of my constituents to communicate our deep concerns about the negative impact the proposed sale of approximately five acres of Takoma Metro property would have on transit access for our community.

I want to make three main points:

- 1) The proposed design for the Takoma Metro station violates one of the basic principles of transit-oriented development. Rather than increasing access to transit, it would actually impede many transit users from getting to the station.
- 2) This poor design is the result of a flawed process that put the transit needs of the station second to the space needed for development. In fact, after the mistakes made in the process of planning at this station, WMATA changed its joint development guidelines to prevent this kind of outcome at another station.
- 3) The contract for the sale of the land at the Takoma Metro station is very unusual in that WMATA bears the cost of replacing the transit facilities that have to be moved to permit housing development. In fact, the way the contract is written, after paying to replace the transit facilities, WMATA could receive little or nothing for the sale of the land.

Although this station is located in the District of Columbia, it serves as the primary gateway to the Metrorail system for my constituents in Takoma Park. Takoma Park is a transit-oriented community where 25 percent of the workforce commutes by public transit and another 18 percent carpools, walks or bikes to work. It is a community where 61 percent of the households either don't own a car or own only one car; a community served by 18 Ride On and Metrobus routes, ten of which use the Takoma Station; and a community which parks in the short-term-parking-only Takoma Station parking lot to take the Metro to run errands, attend meetings, attend cultural and sporting events, and shop.

I have been involved for many years in transportation issues in our region. For more than a decade, I have represented Takoma Park on the Metropolitan Washington Transportation Planning Board. I served as Chair of the Transportation Planning Board in 2000. Until last month, I chaired the TPB's Access for All committee, which helps bring groups such as minorities, low-income people, and people with disabilities into the regional transportation planning process. As you know, Mrs. Mack, you asked me to

serve on the WMATA board's Ad Hoc Metro Access Advisory Committee. Now, I chair the TPB's new Human Service Transportation Coordination Task Force.

Proposed Design for the Transit Facilities Would Reduce, Not Enhance, Transit Users' Access to the Station

Let me cover the three points I made earlier one by one. First, if you look at the overall design proposed for the Takoma station, you can see that the amount of land retained for transit use is too small and awkwardly shaped. As a result:

- The dedicated space for buses is greatly reduced, leaving room for only ten bus bays and no real layover spaces. Under the proposed design, there is no room for any expansion of bus space in the future.

WMATA staff has maintained that they feel ten bus bays and two layover spaces will be sufficient to meet need both now and the foreseeable future. Despite the recommendations of the Regional Bus Study and the Takoma Transportation Study that more bus bays will be needed, this plan limits the bus bay area in such a way that expansion in the future is impossible.

The analysis that justifies including only ten bus bays apparently takes into account only those bus routes that exist or that are in adopted plans for fifteen or twenty years into the future. But plans change based on rider demand, funding availability, and political will. For example, in 1997, when the eastern third of Takoma Park (including the ward I then represented on the City Council) became part of Montgomery County, I went to the state legislature and got additional funding to extend Ride On Route 16 through that section of the City. The ridership demand had always been there, but the funding had not been until our State Senator got special funding to get the route extended.

Given increasing traffic congestion in Montgomery County, I believe that funding for transit is likely to increase over the next several years. With new development in downtown Silver Spring and planned redevelopment in Longbranch and Takoma-Langley, there is every reason to believe that the demand for bus service at the Takoma Metro will increase. Failing to plan for that increase, and in fact precluding additional bus service to the station, is short-sighted and counter to the goal of increasing the use of transit.

- The proposed parking lot would contain half the parking spaces of the present parking lot. Increasing the number of parking spaces by building a second parking deck would be very expensive.

The proposed plan shows a 75-space surface parking lot replacing the present 150-space parking lot. Except for a few 15-minute spaces, most of the spaces in the current lot are for short-term use. Parking in about half of the present lot is prohibited before 10:00 am and in the other half is prohibited beyond 3:30 pm to discourage all-day commuter parking. The developer's own estimates show that the cost of increasing the number of

spaces to about 130 by building a two-level parking garage would be \$5.7 million. This is \$2.8 million more than their estimate of the cost of the surface lot.

We updated these figures, based on data from a construction management company, and found that, based on current trends in construction costs and addressing some insufficiencies in the estimates, current costs for the surface parking lot are more likely to be about \$3.6 million and for the two-story parking structure to be about \$7 million.

If a three-level garage were to be built in order to provide one-to-one replacement of parking spaces, as was required in the initial joint development guidelines and is recommended in the Takoma Central District Plan, the cost would be about \$7.4 million. And this is for a parking structure with no decorative façade, which would probably be required at this location.

- The circulation on the site is very problematic, with buses and cars sharing the only entrance on Eastern Avenue and the bus turnaround circle.

The proposed plans for the Takoma Metro site will lead to a great deal of frustration with on-site traffic congestion. Cars and buses will share a single entrance on Eastern Avenue, causing delays for buses exiting in this direction, as do most of the buses headed into Takoma Park. In addition, because the designated passenger drop-off sites are far from the elevator entrance to the station and the bus turnaround circle is right next to the elevator entrance, it is easy to predict that cars will stop in the bus turnaround circle to drop off passengers, blocking buses trying to turn around.

Access for riders with disabilities to this station is especially difficult. Long distances separate the designated handicapped parking spots from the entrances to the station and disabled patrons would have to cross the bus circle. This provides all the more reason for those dropping off riders with disabilities in the bus turnaround circle.

- In spite of the planned route for the Metropolitan Branch Trail coming into the station, bicycle access is reduced.

Although, the District of Columbia is planning to route its portion of the Metropolitan Branch Trail through this station, the design provides no space for a bicycle trail. Because of the new bike trail, more bicycle riders will be using the station. But the proposed design reduces the number of bike lockers to fewer than are presently at the station and has no good location for bike racks.

Flawed Planning Process Put Transit Needs Second to Development

The design process for this site was done backwards. A transit-oriented process would begin with an assessment of transit needs and a determination of the space needed for transit facilities, then would allocate the remaining space to development. Instead the housing development was designed first and the transit facilities were crammed into the remaining space.

The initial joint development proposal for property at the Takoma Metro was received in 1999, under the old WMATA joint development guidelines. This proposal was the only one WMATA received for this property. Prior to accepting this proposal, no work had been done to determine what space was necessary to retain for current and future transit facilities at the station. No review of community goals regarding the site had been undertaken. As a result, the developers planned the housing first and designed the transit facilities to fit around the housing project they designed.

The public outcry caused WMATA to rethink its joint development process and issue new guidelines. New joint development projects put transit first, but this better approach has not been applied to the Takoma Metro project. Unfortunately, the mistakes made in this process were not corrected, leaving our station as the example of bad planning that led to reform in the joint development process.

Problems with Contract Could Leave WMATA with Little or Nothing for Sale of Land

Besides the problems with the site design and access issues, perhaps the major concern we have with the proposal is that the contract with the developer is structured in such a way as to leave WMATA with little or no profit from the sale of the land. Joint development projects are supposed to bring money into the Metro system and promote the type of development around Metro stations that increase ridership. Because of the structure of the contract, this sale is likely to bring little or no money into the system and may raise WMATA operating and capital costs in the long run.

When this project was first proposed, and application was made to the Federal Transit Administration for approval, the developer purchasing the property was to pay \$7.3 million for the land and pay for the replacement of the transit facilities.

But, due to subsequent changes in the contract, the developer is now obligated to pay between \$7.3 and \$9 million for the property and, most surprisingly, *will be able to deduct the cost of replacing the transit facilities from the purchase price*. Contrary to the guidelines of the joint development program and normal practice in land development, under this contract WMATA will in essence pay for changes in its infrastructure that benefit the private developer.

This arrangement could result in very little money left over for WMATA after paying for the transit facilities. For example, a two-story parking garage costing \$7 million would alone eat up most of the profit from this sale.

We have seen similar arrangements in situations where public facilities are improved and the cost of the improvements is too high for a public body to afford. In this case, however, the transit facilities are made worse – smaller, less accessible, and more congested. If lawsuits related to reduced handicapped accessibility or other factors were to force WMATA to upgrade the transit facilities, either before they are built or after, WMATA would bear the cost of the upgrades. In any case, WMATA and Ride On will

have to pay the increased operating costs due to delayed bus schedules and increased fuel use, as well as for staffing for traffic control at the station.

After all is said and done, WMATA will make little or no money from this project and will be left with a station that doesn't work for transit. My constituents and yours will have more trouble getting to the station that is their main access point for the Metrorail system. And all because of a planning process that failed. I ask you to please take another look at this troubled design and give us a station that will serve our communities perhaps even better than the present station. Our community and the WMATA board have a shared interest in making this a well-designed and accessible gateway to the Metro system.

Thank you for your attention. I am available to answer any questions you may have.

Testimony of Councilmember Joy Austin-Lane

Dear Chairman Mack and Members of the Board,

Thank you for this opportunity to speak concerning the proposed sale of land at the Takoma Metro Station and its impact on transit access.

I am Joy Austin-Lane, Councilmember of Ward 1. My district is immediately adjacent to the Takoma Metro Station. A number of my constituents' homes face the Metro property.

All of my ward is within walking distance of the station and many of my constituents do walk. Ten bus routes through my ward terminate at the Takoma Metro.

In my ward is a 185-unit apartment building for elderly and disabled persons called Victory Tower. Many of the Victory Tower residents ride the bus to the station or go to the station by car. They regularly use the elevator entrance.

Ward 1 includes most of the Takoma Park side of the Old Takoma Business Association. The Association includes businesses in both Takoma, DC and Takoma Park, Maryland. The Association is concerned with the health of the businesses, the attractiveness of the streetscape, the connectivity of the business district as it goes past the Takoma Metro, and the ease of walking and parking for its patrons.

Also in my ward is the Takoma Park–Silver Spring Campus of Montgomery College, just down the Metropolitan Branch Bike Trail from the Takoma Metro Station. The campus is in the process of building new facilities and renovating its existing campus. It is a commuter campus, with no student housing.

The proposal on the table does not meet the needs of my constituents. Under the plans before you today, a congested bus/car circle will block easy access to the elevator for the elderly patrons. The business district will face difficult traffic and parking problems in the area. Bike storage is reduced and bicycle paths are missing from the plans. A constrained area for buses means that flexibility for expanded bus service for college students is very limited.

There are other ways of developing the Takoma Metro site that would bring more money to Metro while enhancing access to transit and meeting community goals. Many of these ideas were explored at the March 4 worksession sponsored by Metro. The proposal before you is the wrong approach.

It is time for Metro to move on. Take the time to determine what transit facilities are needed at the Takoma Metro site now and in the future. Make that aspect work first. If there is excess developable land, and developing that land is consistent with community goals, then proceed. But the time to stop pushing for this unworkable and inappropriate plan is now.

Testimony of Councilmember Colleen Clay

Dear Chairman Mack and Members of the Board,

Thank you for this opportunity to speak concerning the proposed sale of land at the Takoma Metro Station and its impact on transit access.

I am Colleen Clay, Councilmember of Ward 2. Residents of my ward live between a half mile from the Takoma Metro Station to less than a mile and a half from the Takoma Metro. Many of my constituents ride buses to the station. Five bus routes that go through my ward terminate at the Takoma Metro—Ride On Routes 12, 13, 16, 18 and 25. I use Metro myself, riding my bike to the station, where I rent a bike locker. My ward depends on this service.

I am a professional planner and work in the field of planning and have taught planning in college. I am very supportive of transit-oriented development, and support proposals that increase foot traffic in the Takoma Metro area. I have come to speak to you today because after reviewing the proposals for the Takoma Metro site, it is clear to me that the development of this site under the current contract conditions will result in a reduction in transit accessibility both now and into the near future.

I know you'll hear a lot of detail tonight from concerned citizens and officials about the specific objections to various elements of this plan from esthetic design details to broad concerns about traffic congestion, loss of open space and a decline in transit accessibility. As a planner and a public official myself, I know that when such a large project is on the table you can get mired in such important details, in formulating acceptable responses, and then lose sight of the bigger picture. So I would like to take one step back.

My tenure in this city is not as long as others, so I started my examination of this issue by speaking with developers and city officials about the context of this development proposal. What I heard from several people is that when this proposal was initially put forth, there was very little development in the surrounding area, the land was much less valuable, construction costs were lower, there was limited interest in the site, and the project was thought crucial in spurring additional development in the area. It was an accomplishment on the part of Metro to get a bidder on the property with a track record like EYA.

However, as the development process moved forward, it became clear that the site could not meet all of the needs envisioned by the planners and the board. This is evident if you review the progress of the developing proposal. Let's review those needs first:

- Increase transit accessibility
- Spur development and revitalization
- Make enough profit from land sale to fund site improvements

Maintain or improve existing site amenities, improve area traffic flow, and increase public safety.

This translates into four critical site functions – Housing, Bus space, Parking and Open Space, all while maintaining a workable foot and vehicle traffic flow. It rapidly became clear to EYA, Metro and the community, that there was not room for everything, and the first things to go were half of the parking and access from across the tracks. Residents complained about the loss of transit access. Then some parking is replaced and costs go up, so the project will likely cost more than the contract on the land. Metro comes to a council meeting and states that money will be lost that is critical to other transit projects. Finally, the transit bus bays are squeezed tighter, future estimates are downplayed, layovers are adjusted in order to meet today's bus needs. By this point it is obvious that no one will get what they want, except possibly the developer, and they are probably not happy either.

I think you get the picture – every time you solve one site constraint you negatively affect another goal. It has become obvious that this site is unworkable. And, in the mean time, other development has come online, negating the need for the housing on the site. The one remaining tangible benefit is the housing, and I would put forth that even at a \$50,000 per unit sale price, the housing would not be worth the loss of transit access, which is critical to this community.

In spite of all of this, I would like to suggest that this process is not yet a failure. This is how the planning process works. In fact, this is a great case study. The only question left is whether this will be a case study taught in Citizen Participation in the Planning Process titled,

“Metro Board averts development fiasco after citizen input details flaws”

or a series of headlines about the “Metro Development Boondoggle.”

Please remember that Transit is first in Transit Oriented Development. Thank you for your time.

Testimony of Councilmember Bruce R. Williams

Dear Chairman Mack and Members of the Board,

Thank you for this opportunity to speak concerning the proposed sale of land at the Takoma Metro Station and its impact on transit access.

I am Bruce Williams, Councilmember of Ward 3. Residents of my ward live between a quarter of a mile from the Takoma Metro Station to just about a mile from the Takoma Metro. Many of my constituents walk or ride buses to the station. Four bus routes that go through my ward terminate at the Takoma Metro—Ride On Routes 12, 13, 16 and 18.

I use Metro myself, taking it to Metropolitan Washington Council Of Government Board meetings, other meetings hosted by COG, and to other events in the region. When I take Metro, it is usually for mid-day meetings, so I am one of the people who uses the existing parking at the Metro site. I know that if I try to park on site anytime after about 11 o'clock, I may not find a spot. Reducing this parking by any number will likely cause me to drive to meetings rather than to use Metro. Multiply my situation by others who use Metro in the same way, and transit use will decrease if the parking area is reduced—this would not be a responsible action by the WMATA Board.

I'd also like to reinforce a point about future need for bus bays. Making decisions about the number of bus bays needed in the future should not be limited to only considering those routes which are currently funded in any agency's capital budget. You need to retain the flexibility to address needs ten, fifteen, twenty years out and beyond. If you see land necessary to do anything additional beyond this current proposal, you are constraining your own ability to address future transit needs.

When we passed our recent City Council resolution regarding this proposal, I commented, "We are for transit oriented development. We are for Smart Growth. This isn't smart and it isn't transit oriented." As you will hear over the course of this evening, this proposal is a bad idea. Please take this opportunity to do the right thing and make sure the transit function works at the Takoma Metro.

Thank you.

Testimony of Councilmember Terry Seamens

Dear Chairman Mack and Members of the Board,

Thank you for this opportunity to speak concerning the proposed sale of land at the Takoma Metro Station and its impact on transit access.

I am Terry Seamens, Councilmember of Takoma Park Ward 4. My constituents are primarily low-income renters, many of whom do not own cars, and therefore depend on public transportation. People from my neighborhood get to the Takoma Metro Station by walking, taxicab, or—most often—riding a bus. They ride on one of the four bus routes that go through my Ward and terminate at the Takoma Metro—Ride On Routes 3, 14, 24 and 25. As gasoline prices rise, and force other costs up, more and more of my neighbors are turning to mass transportation to save money.

My constituents and I are very concerned that, if implemented, WMATA's current plan will make access to the Metro less convenient, and unsafe for many. It presents serious problems for seniors and those with physical disabilities. Furthermore, this plan does not adequately provide for anticipated future expansion. And, if the transportation planners have underestimated the community's future dependency on mass transit, the plan eliminates the possibility of correcting that mistake. The land will be gone.

The problem is centered in the priority of the design goals. My constituents ask that you throw out this design, and set the transportation and community requirements, before you decide what land is available for sale. With a transportation-based design, mobility challenged riders will not have to cross unregulated bus lanes and travel over one hundred feet to the elevator, as this design requires. A community-sensitive, transportation-based design will put bus layover bays off the streets. A design that isn't focused on developer needs will provide an off-street location for taxis and kiss-and-ride drivers to drop off passengers.

My constituents are concerned that your design puts their needs at the bottom of the list. They're concerned that this plan is aimed to provide housing for people who can afford other than public transportation. With your plan, each homeowner will have space for two cars, while the people who need public transportation must compromise now and give up hope for the future. Please clear the slate and design for transportation needs, before you sell any land.

Thank you for your consideration.

Testimony of Councilmember Marc Elrich

Dear Chairman Mack and Members of the Board,

Thank you for this opportunity to speak concerning the proposed sale of land at the Takoma Metro Station and its impact on transit access.

I am Marc Elrich, Councilmember of Ward 5 in Takoma Park. Residents of my ward live between three-quarters of a mile to a mile and a half from the Takoma Metro. Many of my constituents ride buses to the station. Seven bus routes that go through my ward terminate at the Takoma Metro—Ride On Routes 12, 13, 14, 16, 18, 24 and 25.

My ward includes a large number of apartments. Because of the way these apartments were developed, there is little off-street parking for the residents. My ward depends on mass transit.

My ward also includes two major institutions: Washington Adventist Hospital and Columbia Union College. The college has both a resident student population and adult evening classes. The hospital, which had announced plans to leave Takoma Park, has now put its plans on hold. The traffic impact study submitted by EYA stated that the hospital will be moving and so discounted future traffic related to the hospital. If the hospital stays, bus service is needed for employees, visitors and some patients. If the hospital moves and another entity takes its place, bus service will still be needed.

The process by which the Takoma Metro joint development project came about was badly flawed. The land was advertised for joint development before the area needed for transit and the community goals for the site were determined. Because of the controversy the Takoma Metro proposal generated when it first became public, WMATA looked at its policies and saw that the joint development process needed to be changed. The new process is better, and I have seen it at work in public meetings concerning the Silver Spring Metro and the Forest Glen Metro.

Unfortunately, the WMATA Board did not also take that opportunity to say, “Let’s fix the problem at the Takoma Metro.” I have heard WMATA staff say in public that the way the Takoma Metro project was handled was a mistake, and that they’re not doing the joint development program in that way anymore. But it’s not too late to fix the Takoma Metro process. Nothing has been sold yet. Nothing has been built yet. This is Board’s opportunity to live up to its better judgment on the joint development process.

Thank you.

Testimony of Councilmember Doug Barry

Dear Chairman Mack and Members of the Board,

Thank you for this opportunity to speak concerning the proposed sale of land at the Takoma Metro Station and its impact on transit access.

I am Doug Barry, Councilmember of Ward 6. Residents of my ward live between 1.3 and 1.8 miles from the Takoma Metro Station. My ward includes the intersection of University Boulevard and New Hampshire Avenue, the future site of the Takoma-Langley stop on the Purple Line. This intersection has bus ridership numbers that are higher than those at dozens of Metrorail stations in the Washington Metropolitan Area. I have been told they are higher than at any other regional location that is not at a Metrorail station. To help accommodate these riders safely, a new bus transit center has been designed by the State of Maryland. Construction is to begin as soon as land acquisition issues have been resolved.

The new transit center will be designed to maximize pedestrian safety and will be an attractive focal point for the neighborhood. Large numbers of residents in this area do not own cars and are completely dependent on public transportation. Families that do own cars will be more likely to ride the bus once the transit station is completed. For this reason, ridership is likely to increase.

In addition, the Takoma-Langley area is to be the subject of a major planning effort, redeveloping it as a central business district and destination in its own right. Funding for the first part of this work is in the current Prince George's County budget.

The major connection between this busy area and the Takoma Metro Station is Ride On Route 16. Information concerning this bus route was left out of the traffic impact analysis submitted by EYA, thus significantly undercounting the number of bus trips at the Takoma Metro Station. Bus Route 18 also connects my constituents to the station.

What a shame to improve the opportunities to connect with the Takoma Metro Station just at the time when transit access at the station will be constrained! Rather than proceed with a poorly-planned joint development project, let's put the "transit" back into Transit Oriented Development at the Takoma Metro.

There is time to correct the situation with the Takoma Metro. There is time to acknowledge the transit needs of the Takoma Park and Takoma, D.C. communities. There is time to allow the Metro Board to live up to its financial responsibilities for receiving fair compensation for the sale of public property and for not obligating WMATA to costly future transit facility expenditures. This is the time!

Thank you.